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Chapter 5 Communist Nationalisms, Internationalisms, and Cosmopolitanisms: The Case of the German Democratic Republic

Elaine Kelly

One of the difficulties associated with attempts to challenge the hegemony of the nation in music historiography is the extent to which constructs of nation, national identity, and national politics have actually shaped the production and reception of western art music. Over the past two centuries, nation states have served as a vital financial lifeline for composers and musical ensembles; in turn, music has been cast time and again in the role of handmaid to political nationalism, charged with legitimizing existing nation states and sounding idealized constructs of nation into being. In response, scholars seeking to confront the national in music history often turn to the liminal spaces between and beyond political borders where the ties of nation have little purchase. Recent studies of the cosmopolitan aesthetics and worldviews borne of experiences of exile and statelessness offer compelling challenges to the nation-based narratives that dominate histories of nineteenth and twentieth-century music (cf. Cohen 2012, 2014). Yet, while such scholarship is of considerable significance in its own right, the tendency within it to posit cosmopolitanism in direct opposition to nationalism can be limiting. The positioning of cosmopolitanism as an outright ethical rejection of nationalism – be it voluntary or forced – underplays the complex identity politics of individuals. It also runs the risk of neglecting just how deeply the practices of western art music are woven into the fabric of institutional nationalism. As a number of recent studies that draw on Kwame

Anthony Appiah's construct of 'rooted cosmopolitanism' observe, nationalism and cosmopolitanism, far from being antithetically opposed, are often 'mutually constructing' (Turino 2000; Pasler 2013). Artists can commit to cosmopolitan perspectives without abandoning national allegiances.

Models that acknowledge the co-existence of nationalism and cosmopolitanism are particularly useful where the Soviet Bloc is concerned. Nationalism loomed large in communist culture. This reflects the extent to which policies of centralization and nationalization shackled the production of art music to the state. It was also, however, indicative of the importance accorded to the idea of the nation in Soviet ideology. Neither Lenin nor Stalin conceived of nationalism as being in opposition to Marxism. On the contrary, as Yuri Slezkine (1994: 415) observes, "the world's first state of workers and peasants" was the first state to institutionalize ethnoterritorial federalism, classify all citizens according to their biological nationalities and formally prescribe preferential treatment of certain ethnically defined populations'. The Soviet nationalities policy rolled out in the 1920s framed the drive to strengthen the national identities of the Soviet Union's non-Russian territories as an emancipatory effort, as a counteractive to the imperialist rule of the Russian Empire. By the 1930s, this policy had assumed Herderian qualities. Stalin in his 'national in form and socialist in content' declaration of 1934 located the route to a shared communist future in the national pasts of the various ethnic groups that comprised the Soviet Union, and exhorted each to uncover the latent socialist content in its national culture (cf. Frolova-Walker 1998; Karnes 2008). On the one hand, this focus on national sentiment was pragmatic. Nationalism was harnessed across the Soviet Union, and later across the Soviet Bloc, to legitimize socialist regimes, to stabilize fragile communities, and as a conduit for the introduction of Marxist ideology. It was also, however, borne of what Frolova-Walker (1998:

332) has described as a ‘renaissance of romantic nationalism’; at its heart was an ideal of an untainted national soul.

The emphasis on the nation in Soviet policy by no means involved an abandonment of the internationalism implicit in Marxist thought. On the contrary; whereas cosmopolitanism – conceived of in Soviet rhetoric as a state of circumstantial or voluntary nationlessness – was denigrated as one of the great threats to the communist project, nationalism and internationalism were presented as stages on a single continuum. The utopian stateless communist society was posited as being an outgrowth rather than the inverse of the nation state. Characteristic in this regard was Andrei Zhdanov’s 1948 (1950: 62–63) cautionary admonition with regard to socialist culture that ‘internationalism grows where national culture flourishes. To forget this is to lose one’s individuality and become a cosmopolitan without a country’.

Artists and intellectuals played a pivotal role in giving expression to this nation-centric view of the world. Across the Soviet Bloc, they constructed nations out of sound, words, and images and helped to imbue the normative discourse of socialism with local inflections. Yet, members of the cultural elite often offset this civic nationalism with personal perspectives that were far more cosmopolitan in their outlook. In what follows, I will look at how this dialectic of nationalism and cosmopolitanism played out in the case of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The essay will look first at the models of nationalism and internationalism that were intrinsic to the official identity of the state, and will then discuss how prominent figures such as Paul Dessau, Eberhard Rebbling and Hanns Eisler sometimes deviated from this worldview on a personal level in order to deal that which was not addressed in the state’s foundation myths, most notably the Holocaust.

Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and Internationalism in the GDR: Official Perspectives

The constellation of nationalism, internationalism, and cosmopolitanism played a particularly important role in the early years of the German Democratic Republic. The ruling elite invoked nationalism to shore up a community that had been decimated by war and to sweeten the seismic ideological changes that accompanied the transformation from Nazism to communism. Germany's illustrious cultural heritage was recast within a socialist framework to form a collective memory that could supplant the conflicted individual experiences of the recent past and serve as the foundation for a new socialist Germany. And, Marxist ideology and socialist realism were presented as inherently German constructs. Characteristic was Ernst Hermann Meyer's address at the Second Congress of the GDR's Composers' Union in 1952, in which he defined socialist realism as, among other things, that which: '(in Stalin's words) is national in form, i.e. that expresses the national and psychological character of our people; is genuinely and deeply traditional (*Volkstümlich*)...; is built on the classical heritage without simply reiterating it...' (Cited in Dibelius and Schneider 1993: 132).

The vision of the national self in the infant GDR found its inverse in the cosmopolitan other, the foreign enemy against which the socialist German state could unite. The protection and development of the national culture was presented to composers, musicians, and audiences as a civic responsibility, while charges of cosmopolitan were levelled at anything deemed to undermine or oppose the essence of the German nation. Most charges of this nature were levelled at the imperialist west. Characteristic, for example, was the condemnation of the West German government on the occasion of Beethoven's 125th anniversary in 1952 for its 'cosmopolitan attempt to degrade the great German cultural values in order to destroy the national consciousness of the German people' ('Zum 125. Todestag' 1952: 74). Ernst

Hermann Meyer, in his seminal tome on socialist realism, *Musik im Zeitgeschehen*, which was published the same year, expanded on this notion of cosmopolitanism as an agent of the west. He described cosmopolitanism as a ‘supranational’ phenomenon that aimed to rob nations of their ‘national consciousnesses’ in order to turn them into ‘slaves of American imperialism.’ He cautioned that ‘the rotten cosmopolitanism has become in the territory of music in particular, a dangerous ideological weapon in the hand of American imperialist robber barons.’ (Meyer 1952: 188–189.) As was the case in the Soviet Union, the threat of cosmopolitanism was not restricted to those in the west; even the most politically engaged of East German artists were considered susceptible to its invidious influence. Accusations of cosmopolitanism were commonplace for works perceived to have misrepresented or failed to engage with the national heritage such as Hanns Eisler’s libretto *Johann Faustus* or Paul Dessau and Bertolt Brecht’s opera *Das Verhör des Lukullus* (cf. Lucchesi 1995).

Invariably, ‘bad’ cosmopolitanism was contrasted with ‘good’ internationalism. Characteristic, for example, is the damning review of the 1956 Darmstadt Festival that was penned by Harry Goldschmidt for *Musik und Gesellschaft*, the journal of the Composers’ Union. Goldschmidt notably contrasted the cosmopolitanism of what he described as the ‘Esperanto constructed out of notes,’ spoken ‘in Babylonian tongues in Darmstadt,’ with new realistic composition grounded in ‘genuine, unifying [*völkerverbindenden*] internationalism’ (Cited in Dibelius and Schneider 1993: 197). In a later volume of the same journal, Hans-Georg Uszkoreit, head of the music section of the Ministry for Culture, advised those responsible for the organisation of concerts in the GDR that programmes should include not only works from the German and Soviet canons, but also compositions exemplifying the national traditions of other countries so that audiences could be educated in ‘the sense of a democratic internationalism’ (Uszkoreit 1955: 122).

Quinn Slobodian (2015: 222) describes the worldview encapsulated in socialist internationalism as ‘socialist multilateralism,’ a concept he defines as ‘a means of representing the world without disrupting the primacy of the nation-state container.’ It can be observed, for example, in the international solidarity and friendship festivals that proliferated in the post-war period. These events celebrated the global reach of socialism, but also prescribed a strict division of the world into distinct nations, each with their own unique ethnic and cultural profiles. Notable in this regard is Joris Ivens’s documentary film *Freundschaft Siegt* (1951) of the 3rd World Festival of Youth and Students, which took place in East Berlin in 1951. At the centre of the film is footage of a series of outdoor performances by groups from Africa, South America, Eastern Europe and the Far East, each showcasing their national folk music, and each garbed in national costume.¹ The effect of these celebrations of national identity is heightened by their position in the film. They follow immediately after a chapter depicting the dehumanizing effects of cosmopolitanism, capitalism and coco-colonisation in West Berlin.

An even more pronounced paean to socialist multilateralism is Ivens’s 1954 film *Das Lied der Ströme* (The Song of the Rivers). In terms of its production, the film was a model of international collaboration; indeed, Nick Hodgkin (2016: 39-42) hails it as an early example of transnationalism. The film was produced by the East German state film company DEFA, footage was shot by camera crews from eighteen different countries, and the central creative team was international to its core: Joris Ivens was Dutch but living in the GDR; the score was provided by Russian composer Shostakovich and lyrics to some of the songs by the German writer Bertolt Brecht; the French-based Russian émigré writer Vladimir Pozner worked with Ivens to construct the film’s scenario; Spanish artist Pablo Picasso provided the illustration

for the cover of the film book; and the title song was sung in the English-language version of the film by American singer Paul Robeson and in the German-language version by Ernst Busch (Shoots 2000: 244–45). Yet, despite its transnational production process, the film itself evinces a conception of internationalism that reinforces rather than transcends national borders. The film takes as its subject the communist-led World Federation of Trade Unions conference, held in Vienna in 1953, and intersperses footage from the conference with scenes of people at work along each of the world's five major rivers – the Mississippi, the Ganges, the Nile, the Yangtze, the Volga, and the Amazon. Each nation is presented as a self-contained entity defined by unique characteristics and indigenous music. And crucially, these nations exist in parallel along a spectrum of Marxist social development – with Russia and China at one end, and the oppressed peoples of the West and post-colonial developing countries at the other. This hierarchy is reflected in the film's music. Thus, for example, while scenes of Chinese workers engaged in a team effort to build a dam on the Yangtze are accompanied by the jubilant tones of a mixed-voice Chinese choir, the dismal fate of Black workers on the Mississippi unfolds to the quiet strains of a solitary male voice quietly singing a melancholic African-American work song.

Cosmopolitan Socialists

The power of socialist multilateralism in the context of the infant GDR was three-fold. First, it offered a reimagining of the world that had the idea of nation at its core, and so fed into the wider nation-building tendencies that accompanied the drive to legitimize the state. Second, it served as a more palatable alternative to the dubious worldviews that had dominated in the Third Reich. Third, despite its nods towards egalitarianism, it offered a model of the world that emphasized the superiority of the Soviet system. For rank-and-file citizens, the basic tenets of socialist multilateralism came to reflect the realities of their own existence within

the GDR. The restrictions placed on international travel and exchange encouraged an insular nationalism and a tendency to view the world in terms of self and other. Somewhat ironically, such a clear-cut perspective of the world often resonated far less with those actually responsible for its implementation.

Recent scholarship on the Soviet Bloc has done much to expose the extent to which communist societies even during their most repressive periods were far from monolithic. Despite the force with which official narratives were projected, space invariably existed for more complex and nuanced perspectives. A striking example of this is Moscow in the 1930s. The city was the uncontested epicentre of communist nationalism and Stalinist centralization; yet, as Katrina Clark has demonstrated, it was simultaneously perceived of by many Russian intellectuals as a transnational hub. Artists such as the film director Sergei Eisenstein did not see themselves as being bound by their Russianness; they identified also as members of a ‘transnational cultural space’, that included figures such as György Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Lion Feuchtwanger, Heinrich and Thomas Mann, and Ernest Hemingway (Clark 2011: 31-32). Crucially, this cosmopolitan perspective did not necessitate a rejection of communist nationalism. On the contrary, as Clark argues (34), those who subscribed to it were also ‘grounded in Soviet patriotism’, and contributed significantly to the construction of Soviet cultural identity.

Cosmopolitanism, as Ryan Minor observes (2013), is frequently cast in heroic terms, portrayed as a rational rejection of the narrow chauvinism and patriotic sentimentality begot by an excessive focus on the local. This binary opposition is, of course, problematic on many levels. It assigns an almost primal role to the construct of nation. The nation is presented as something essential, as something into which we are born, to which we are tied, and which

we actively have to transcend. The opposition also, as Appiah has countered, overlooks the fact that people often have multiple allegiances: one can be ‘attached to a home of one’s own, with its own cultural particularities, but tak[e] pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people.’ (1997: 618) In the case of communist intellectuals, these allegiances were not necessarily to home and other, but often to state, self, and an imagined community comprising of a left-leaning European intellegentsia. Intellectuals contributed to the construction of nation out of a sense of duty or obligation to the state. Cosmopolitanism was frequently reserved for more personal expressions.

The complexities of the relationship between nationalism and cosmopolitanism were particularly pronounced for the GDR’s cultural elite, a large proportion of whom had spent the second world war exiled in the west. This group of exiles, which included composers Hanns Eisler and Paul Dessau, writers Bertolt Brecht and Anna Seghers, the philosopher Ernst Bloch, and musicologists Georg Knepler, Eberhard Rebling, and Ernst Hermann Meyer, were firmly committed to the project of building a socialist state, and played a vital role in shaping the antifascist German nation on stage, in music, and on the page. Hanns Eisler composed the GDR’s national anthem among other things. Paul Dessau wrote numerous works celebrating Germany’s illustrious cultural, socialist and antifascist heritages, including his eponymous tribute to the communist resistance fighter Lilo Herrmann (1954), and the score for Andrew and Annelie Thorndike’s monumental *Du und mancher Kamerad* (*The German Story*, 1956). And Georg Knepler led the construction of a national history of music that was conceived firmly in the image of the state and culminated in his two-volume *Musikgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (1961).

As Florian Scheduling explores in his contribution to this volume, public affirmations of the

nation were far from unambiguous. While figures such as Eisler were fundamental in establishing a national discourse for the GDR, their commitment to the idea of the socialist German nation was frequently political rather than sentimental. The relationship of exiles to the nation that had cast them out in the 1930s was inevitably conflicted. If they had engaged with the idea of Germany while abroad, this was with a critical rather than nostalgic or sentimental eye. As Eisler explained to Hans Bunge in 1961:

... once you have been an emigrant for fourteen years, remembering this damned Germany, you get a different view of things. You look back – without sentimentality ... A stupid composer would have turned all that into sentimental trash. My remembering was ‘cool, polite, gentle.’ (Cited in Heister 1993: 203).

Crucially, as Scheduling also observes, the decision by Eisler and other exiles to move to the GDR in no sense equated to a return home. Some of these exiles were not German – Knepler, for instance, was Austrian. Moreover, for those who were German, home, as they once knew it, no longer existed; their social and professional networks had been decimated and there was little left of the aesthetic culture of the Weimar Republic. As the prominent paediatrician Ingeborg Rapoport explained: ‘Coming back was not coming back to my own country – it was actually a second emigration in which I didn’t come back to help Germany, but to help build socialism.’ (Cited in Einhorn 2000: 212) The construction of a stable national identity was part of this remit; the commitment of East German intellectuals to nation building was not, however, an unquestioning one.

Revealing in this context are Eisler’s harsh criticisms of the party manifesto that was produced to mark the Beethoven anniversary celebrations in 1952. Commenting on a draft of

the manifesto in a letter to Egon Rentzsch, who was head of culture in the Party's central committee, Eisler denounced the practice of claiming figures such as Beethoven and Handel for the German nation. As he explained with regard to Handel: 'the German composer was almost never in Germany. He was in Italy in his youth, later in London. The German *Misere*² drove the best composers out of Germany... (That for a Marxist is no bad train of thought). A Marxist has to note that two of the greatest German musicians [Handel and Beethoven], didn't live in Germany, but instead felt themselves to be international'. (Eisler 1982: 195-196).

This sense of feeling international was one that many exiles retained after moving to the GDR. They continued to travel extensively, enjoying privileges that were anathema to ordinary East Germans. Where possible they retained alternative citizenships – both Eisler and Knepler, for example, held on to their Austrian passports and Eisler kept one foot in Vienna throughout his time in the GDR, spending periods of up to seven months there at a time (Schweinhardt 2006). They retained their international networks and continued to engage in international collaborations. Crucially, this transnational existence was not just a way of being. Just as the popular-front internationalism of the 1930s had served in many ways as a response to the perceived limitations of the nation state in the face of fascism, so transnationalism served as a vehicle for exploring political issues that could not easily be addressed within the rigid frameworks of post-war nation states.

Countering National Memories of the Holocaust

One area in which the dialectic between nationalism and cosmopolitanism was pronounced was where the legacy of the Holocaust was concerned. Although German in conception, the Holocaust was, of course, a profoundly transnational phenomenon. Its sites of trauma

spanned the breadth of Nazi-occupied Europe, and the communities that came into being both in concentration camps and in the Diasporas that resulted from forced migration transcended national borders. In the official memories and silences that developed around the Holocaust in the immediate post-war years, this transnationalism was frequently overlooked. The recent past was collectively remembered or forgotten through national narratives, often heroic, that allowed states either to absolve themselves of guilt by passing it elsewhere or, in the case of Israel, to emerge from the shadow of victimhood (Cf. Levy and Sznajder: 93-95).

In the case of the GDR, the Holocaust was subsumed into the state's foundation myth of antifascism. The GDR posited itself as the antifascist alternative to both the Third Reich and the Federal Republic. Antifascism served as a prism through which the tenets of Marxist-Leninism were passed and made palatable for German consumption. It was offered as redemption, and also a means of promoting a socialist dictatorship. A focus on the failure of German democracy, as Jeffrey Herf observes (1997: 78-79), bolstered 'the inclination to impose a new dictatorship of antifascist enlightenment and offer a sense of purpose and justification to those seeking to cleanse and re-educate people gone astray.'³ Socialist antifascism pinpointed capitalism as the root evil of Nazi Germany, and the war itself as a battle pitched primarily between capitalist Nazis and the communist resistance. This binary opposition was conceived firmly along class lines: the aristocracy and middle classes were invariably categorised as Nazi supporters and the working classes as antifascist. Noticeably absent from the equation was the Holocaust. The East German government was reluctant to confront the Jewish question, a stance that can be ascribed to both the traditional Marxist association of religion with capitalism, and the hard-line anti-Semitism emanating from the Soviet Union. Also significant, however, was the determination to depict the war in terms of a valiant struggle. Notably, the East German government divided Nazi victims into two

distinct groups, which as Herf remarks (1997: 95) had ‘clearly unequal status and prestige’. The first group consisted of passive victims of fascism, whose numbers included Jews, homosexuals, and Gypsies. The second group meanwhile were the much-lauded active communist fighters against fascism.

The heroic narrative of antifascism did not have all that much in common with the personal experiences of those had spent the war exiled in the west. The majority of this group were Jewish, and, for the most part, it was primarily their Jewishness rather than their political beliefs that had made exile a necessity. The myth of antifascism offered this group a much-needed vision of a German state in which, theoretically, they could live without fear of persecution and put into practice their political ideals. The myth was frequently not sufficient, however, to deal with either the personal ramifications of the Holocaust or the complexities of Jewish identity in post-war Europe. As such, many artists and intellectuals, while openly committed to the national discourse of antifascism, looked beyond the GDR in order to explore the legacy of the Holocaust. Dessau, for example, confronted the foundation myths of both the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) with his *Jüdische Chronik* (1961), a tribute to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising that was conceived in response to rising antisemitism in the FRG. A setting of a poem by the East German writer Jens Barlach, the piece was a collaborative affair, drawing together composers from the two German states – Paul Dessau and Rudolf Wagner-Régeny from the East and Boris Blacher, Karl Amadeus Hartmann and Hans-Werner Henze from the West. In doing so, as Joy Calico argues (2005), Dessau created a “third space” that transcended the Cold War border and allowed for individual responses to the Holocaust to emerge that were unbound by the strictures of national memory.

While Dessau's *Jüdische Chronik* was very much a German affair, albeit a pan-German one, others looked to spheres unfettered by national ideologies. One such example is the musicologist and pianist Eberhard Rebling, who from his official persona in the GDR seems at first glance an unlikely candidate for cosmopolitanism. Rebling was not Jewish. The son of a Prussian officer and Nazi sympathiser, he voluntarily left Germany for the Netherlands in 1936 in protest against the Third Reich. While in the Netherlands, he fell in love with the Jewish dancer and singer Lin Jaldati, and became heavily involved with the Resistance there. The pair were forced into hiding in 1942, when Jaldati was served with deportation documents, and were subsequently betrayed and arrested in 1944. Rebling escaped but Jaldati was sent to Auschwitz and then Bergen-Belsen. She survived and was reunited with Rebling in the Netherlands after the war. Further difficulties ensued, however, as the two faced ostracization for their communist convictions, and in 1952 they reluctantly moved to the GDR, where Rebling was offered the editorship of the state's flagship music journal *Musik und Gesellschaft*.⁴

Through his activities with *Musik und Gesellschaft*, as professor and rector of the Hochschule für Musik "Hanns Eisler" in Berlin (from 1959), and as a party member (from 1960), Rebling was vociferous in his support for the building of a socialist German nation. Indeed, such was the power he exerted on official musical culture, that he and the other key musicologists with whom he worked – Ernst Hermann Meyer, Georg Knepler, Harry Goldschmidt, and Nathan Notowicz – earned themselves the collective nickname of the *mächtiges Häuflein* or mighty handful (Tischer 2009: 159). In parallel to his official duties, however, Rebling also promoted a left-wing cultural tradition that was quite distinct to that embodied in the national self-image of the GDR. As a pianist, he regularly accompanied Jaldati in concerts of Yiddish songs both in the GDR and abroad. These concerts, which were rooted in the left-wing

culture that had evolved around Yiddish in the 1920s and 1930s, involved a strong emphasis on worker and partisan songs or *Kampflieder*, and, as such, offered an alternative history of the left that was fundamentally international in scope (Cf Shneer 2015). That Rebling was able to balance his national and cosmopolitan personas with little repercussion is revealing of the room to manoeuvre that existed for the GDR's cultural elite. Indeed, as David Shneer demonstrates (2015), the foreign tours he undertook with Jaldati were state sponsored. It was only when he dispensed with the national altogether that his conflicted identity proved too much for GDR officials. A foreign tour that culminated in a series of concerts billed as 'Evenings of Jewish solidarity' in Brussels in 1959, prompted East German politician Albert Norden, himself Jewish, to condemn Rebling and Jaldati for failing to advertise themselves as specifically GDR artists. He wrote: 'After all, you are not rootless cosmopolitans, but are instead well known and esteemed artists of the German Democratic Republic. That fact must always be mentioned when you travel abroad...' (Cited in Shneer 2015: 224)

The final example I want to consider here is that of Hanns Eisler. Like Rebling, Eisler did not feel any immediate draw to Germany after the war. Indeed in 1947 he informed the *Hollywood Citizens News* that he and his wife were preparing to take US citizenship (Schweinhardt and Gall 2014: 150). When he moved to East Berlin after being forced out of the United States by the House Committee of Un-American Activities and after failing to find work in Vienna, he observed his civic commitments to the GDR's nation-building drive without relinquishing the cosmopolitan worldview he had developed during the 1930s. He maintained his international profile, collaborating, for instance, on a number of productions with the communist Theater an der Scala in Vienna, and used this profile to give voice to perspectives that stood in stark contrast to the national discourse of the GDR. The most striking of these endeavours is the score he wrote to Alain Resnais' potent confrontation of

the Holocaust, *Nuit et Brouillard* (Night and Fog, 1955).

The film takes its title from Hitler's 1941 *Nacht and Nebel* or 'night and fog' decree, which aimed to decimate the resistance in occupied countries by spiriting captured fighters away under the dark of night to German concentration camps. The scope of the film is broader than this, however. The film is framed by footage shot by Resnais in 1955 of the deserted former concentration camps at Auschwitz and Majdanek, the peaceful, pastoral nature of which alludes uncomfortably to the silences and amnesia that characterised the process of coming to terms with the past in post-war Europe. Resnais intersperses these bucolic scenes with horrific archival footage and stills of men, women and children being hoarded onto trains bound for concentration camps, of life in the camps, and of the devastation that confronted the allies – the emaciated survivors, and piles of corpses and body parts – when they first entered the camps in 1945. Underpinning these images is the indiscriminate nature of the Holocaust; the victims depicted come from all nations and social groups.⁵

Resnais sought to underscore the authenticity of the film by engaging the French writer Jean Cayrol, who had himself been a 'night and fog' prisoner at Mauthausen, to write and record the voice-over for the film (Hirsch 2010: 30). As a Jewish and German composer, Eisler meanwhile lent the film a certain legitimacy. Resnais had not actually met Eisler prior to commissioning him. He had heard some of Eisler's music and read Adorno and Eisler's 1947 treatise *Composing for the Films* and on this basis asked the production team, Argos Films Paris, for permission to write unsolicited to Eisler in East Berlin. Resnais expected the likelihood of a response to be slim. Eisler, however, jumped at the chance to contribute to a Holocaust tribute outside of the GDR. Eight days after sending the letter, Resnais received a telegram from East Berlin stating simply: 'Good Day. I am coming. Eisler' (Resnais 1964:

372). Eisler arrived in Paris shortly afterwards and began work on the score.⁶

It is not difficult to fathom why Resnais was drawn to Eisler. *Nuit et Brouillard* has strong resonances with Marxist aesthetics (of the Brechtian rather than socialist realist variety).

There is no sense of narrative in the film, no emotive telling of how it was or how we should feel in response. Resnais aims instead to provoke contemplation, to prompt memory, to evoke imagination. Cayrol's voice-over is often ironic, and at times laden with comedic surrealism, not least when he offers an architectural critique of the different types of watchtowers that were constructed in camps: 'alpine style, garage style, Japanese style, without style'. Eisler compounds this detachment in his score for the film. Despite using a thirty-two-instrument ensemble, the musical textures are overwhelmingly sparse and understated. There is notably little of the emotional pathos so beloved of socialist realism and its counterpart communist nationalism.

Of particular interest in the context of this essay are the ways in which Eisler turns the socialist realist dichotomy of good nationalism and bad cosmopolitanism on its head. The only individuals associated with any national tropes in the film are the Nazis, who are notably deflated rather than demonized by Eisler's music. The film includes footage of a Nazi rally from Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*. To this, Eisler sets not military music but a quietly understated ascending ostinato on pizzicato strings, which as Wlodarski observes (2015: 75) 'undercuts the impact of Riefenstahl's images'. In doing so, Eisler mocks not only the Nazis, but also bombastic displays of nationalism more generally. A similar shift away from simplistic monolithic narratives can be observed in the music Eisler sets to the images and footage early in the film of crowds being rounded up by German soldiers and loaded onto trains. Cayrol in his voiceover to these scenes emphasises the international span of the Nazi's

victims, listing in rapid succession the places from which victims were deported: from Łódź, Prague, Brussels, Athens, Zagreb, Odessa and Rome. Eisler unites this disparate community with a disconcertingly upbeat flute and trumpet duet. Devoid of any national connotations, it stands in sharp juxtaposition to the caricature of ‘Deutschland, Deutschland über alles’ that follows as the prisoners are being herded on to trains by German soldiers. As with his treatment of *Triumph of the Will*, the national anthem is divested of all glory and bombast: it is presented by muted trumpet as a series of exaggeratedly detached notes.

Conclusion

The selection of examples discussed here is necessarily a small one. Taken together, however, they hint at the complex identity politics that characterised life for the GDR’s cultural elite. Matthias Tischer (2009) has proposed the phenomenon of ‘composing for and against the state’ to describe Dessau’s ability to function simultaneously as a composer of official and unofficial music in the GDR. The model could usefully be expanded to encapsulate how certain East German intellectuals worked for and against the ideal of the German nation that was propagated in the state. Despite being instrumental in shaping this ideal, they did not succumb to the emotional fervour that accompanied its implementation in the public sphere. Moreover, their lived experiences and transnational existences embodied a post-war cosmopolitanism that was quite at odds with the neatly delineated world view of socialist multilateralism. Ultimately, nationalism remained for them a political tool; their personal identities reflected far more nuanced understandings of humanity.

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¹ <http://www.progress-film.de/freundschaft-siegt.html>. The chapter in question begins at 56'07.

² The theory of German *Misere*, or German wretchedness, which was developed by German communists exiled in California and Mexico during the war, identified the German *Sonderweg* as the latest manifestation of a national malaise that could be traced back to the suppression of the Peasants' War in 1525.

³ Herf offers one of the most perceptive accounts of the East German narrative of antifascism. The summary provided here is drawn largely from his work.

⁴ Rebling gives a detailed account of his biography during this period in his 2006 interview with Jochen Voit (Voit 2006).

⁵ On the construction of the film see Hirsch (2010: 28-62).

⁶ For a comprehensive study of the collaborative process between Eisler and Resnais and of Eisler's completed score see Wlodarski (2015: 57-91).